



# A Woman On a Mission: Brenda Coleman-Beattie Works to Make Mental Health Services Accessible to All

People of Color Often Face Special Barriers in Getting Help

Story by Beverly Scarborough  
Photos Courtesy of Brenda Coleman-Beattie

**O**N FEBRUARY 16<sup>TH</sup>, BRENDA COLEMAN-BEATTIE WILL RECEIVE THE Garnett F. Coleman Eternal Flame Award in recognition of her contributions to mental health. Coleman-Beattie has received numerous honors, but this one holds special significance – it will be presented at the Central Texas African American Family Support Conference (CTAAFSC), an event she had a major role in developing and emceed for its first six years.

It has been nearly a decade since Coleman-Beattie, along with healthcare leaders including Dr. King Davis, Willie Williams, Adrian Fowler, Marietta Noel and Richard Hopkins pioneered the concept of a forum in which families, professionals and providers could come together in a supportive environment to embrace diversity, discuss their differences and build common ground. Recognizing that persons of color or from diverse cultural backgrounds may often face barriers or have difficulty in accessing treatment, the CTAAFSC has become a major initiative involving dozens of volunteers. Information and education are provided on mental health, developmental disabilities, chemical dependence and physical health issues. The goal is to increase awareness, reduce stigma, and eliminate health disparities.

Hosted by the Austin Travis County Mental Health Mental Retardation Center, the CTAAFSC is now in its eighth year. Keynoters, including former Surgeon Generals David Satcher and Jocelyn Elders and the late author Bebe Moore Campbell, have drawn standing-room-only crowds. The 2008 Conference will feature 20 workshops on such topics as ADHD, handling stress and the treatment and prevention of diabetes. Oscar-winning

'*Dreamgirl*' Jennifer Holliday will share her personal story about depression at the Friday, February 15<sup>th</sup> luncheon. Local luminaries including Dr. King Davis, Texas State Representative Dawnna Dukes, former Texas State Representative Wilhelmina Delco and Austin Police Department Chief Art Acevedo will address the participants. Coleman-Beattie will receive her award from State Representative Garnett Coleman (no relation), the prominent Houston legislator who has spoken openly on his struggles with bipolar disorder and led the charge to secure public funding for healthcare.

Like many advocates in the field, Coleman-Beattie's involvement began with a personal connection. Her sister Elaine, who is six years older and the sibling closest to her in age, was diagnosed with mild mental retardation when she was four and schizophrenia when she reached adulthood. Coleman-Beattie has embraced the responsibility of ensuring that Elaine has quality of life and adequate care, a quest that has shaped her career and led her to become a member and then president of the Austin Chapter of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI).

It has been an eclectic and sometimes emotional journey for a woman who undoubtedly would have made a significant contribution to any cause she chose to champion. "Extraordinary" is the word friends most use to describe Coleman-Beattie, and the term is no exaggeration. A skilled financial manager and strategist, she has built a career working in a broad array of venues in Seattle, Phoenix, Dallas, Washington, DC and Austin. Her areas of experience span the private sector, city and state government, the utility industry and managed behavioral healthcare. She has

## Central Texas African American Family Support Conference

### 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Central Texas African American Family Support Conference

February 15 – 16, 2008  
Austin Omni Hotel at Southpark  
Hosted by the Austin Travis County MHMR Center

### Conference Highlights + Events

*Dreamgirls* Star Jennifer Holliday, Friday Lunch Keynote  
Emcee: Dr. King Davis  
(cost \$15, scholarships available)  
State Rep. Dawnna Dukes, Saturday Awards Luncheon Keynote  
Emcee: Wilhelmina Delco  
Awards presented to Brenda Coleman-Beattie, Michael Lofton, John Hanson, Pastor Ray F. Jones, the Austin Area Mental Health Association, Traci Patterson and Ikaika Kerr.  
20 Workshops on mental, physical and spiritual health, developmental disabilities and substance use disorders.  
The CTAAFSC is help free of charge and welcomes persons of all backgrounds and ethnicities.  
Register today at <http://www.atcmhmr.com> or by calling 512.440.4024.



*Dreamgirls* Star Jennifer Holliday, Friday Lunch Keynote Speaker

Photo Courtesy of Austin Travis County MHMR Center

achieved stellar success leading turnaround situations, creating start-ups, and improving finances and operations. She is a talented meeting and project facilitator, and has been an invited speaker at over 50 national and local conferences. As the founder and managing principal of 2Thrive4, LLC, a strategy consulting company, she has put her experience to good use working with an impressive roster of clients including health services providers in 15 states.

And that is only one aspect of this multifaceted woman. She is a loyal friend and an outstanding mentor who has influenced the direction of many careers. She is a valued volunteer, equally comfortable supporting grass-roots organizations and serving on prestigious boards including the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Network on Mental Health Policy Research. She maintains a lively circle of international friendships, is fluent in both Spanish and Portuguese, and especially loves all things Brazilian.

Coleman-Beattie was born in Chicago, the youngest in a closely-knit family of five children. Her father was a professional chef and both parents were involved in community and political endeavors. The Colemans were the first African Americans to purchase a home in two Chicago suburbs; at Dirksen Junior High, young Brenda found herself the only black among a student body and staff of 500. Her response was to excel in school and many extracurricular activities, but it was the high school speech team that changed her life. The Dolton Rotary Club, which promoted Rotary's foreign youth exchange program for high school students, asked Coleman-Beattie to give a brief presentation on her life experiences. After she held the audience spellbound for the better part of a day, the Rotary Club president invited her to spend her senior year abroad. Buoyed by the encouragement of her mother, a lifelong risk taker, Coleman-Beattie agreed and was soon on her way to Brazil.

In addition to learning fluent Portuguese, she gained a group of lifelong friends in São Paulo composed of the multicultural families she lived with and whom she still visits regularly.



Beattie and her husband Chester Beattie.

She returned to the States and graduated from Drake University, moving on to Austin because of UT's stellar Latin American graduate studies program. In what can only be chalked-up to fate, she met her husband Chester Beattie, a law student, at a Puerto Rican salsa party at the UT Student Union where they conversed in Portuguese. Their 23-year marriage has survived employment in different cities, 80-hour workweeks and her marathon travel schedule - a credit to the flexibility and graciousness of both partners.

There is a saying that vision without work is dreaming, and that work without vision is drudgery. Brenda Coleman-Beattie has a vision - that business and industry, religious institutions and the community must come together to develop systems of care for the most vulnerable populations in our society. Her award represents both the embodiment of this dream and the formidable talents and sweat equity that she has exercised in helping bring it to fruition. ★

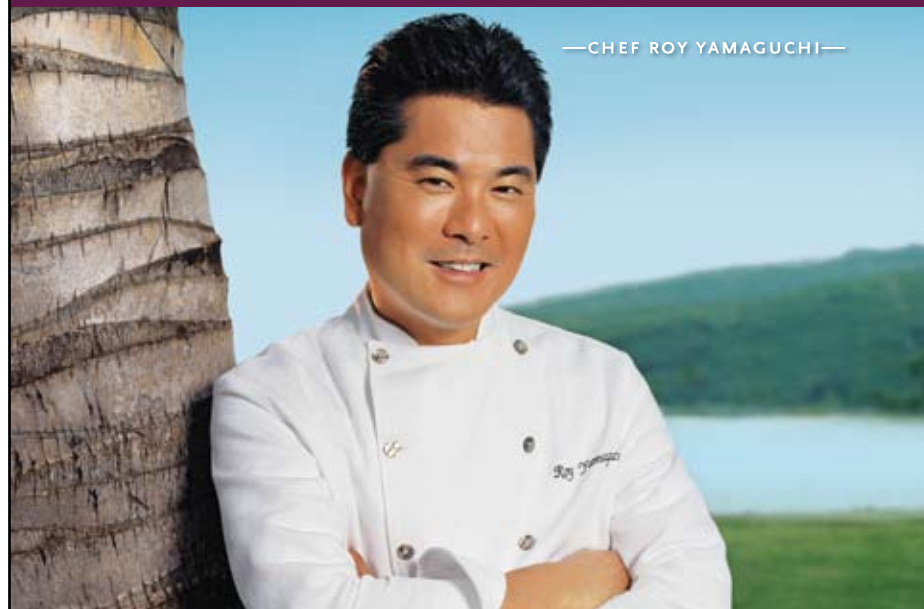
#### MORE INFO

Central Texas African-American Family Support Conference  
February 15-16, 2007  
Austin Omni Hotel at Southpark

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